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Conceptualizing Youth Homelessness in Nigeria

Joseph Aigbolosimon Famous¹ 

¹PhD Candidate, Doctoral School of Sociology, Eotvos Lorand University, Budapest, Hungary. E-mail: joesaintjoefame@gmail.com

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Abstract

Homelessness itself is complex and multidimensional across the world as many studies have indicated but it is even more complex and multidimensional in crisis and insurgencies regions like Nigeria than it is in many developed countries. Homelessness is a serious sociological problem that violates the principles of human rights, undermines human dignity, and threatens social cohesion. Youth homelessness is a severe form of homelessness, and its driving factors are rooted in the whole social system, but the manifestation of the problem reflects social exclusionary pressure which may not only impede daily social engagements of the public but threatens the general peace and embarrass the whole economy. The driving factors are in most cases hidden within the social system with the potential of triggering homelessness and social vulnerability of youths in the society which could in the long run expose the vulnerable homeless youths to anti-social behaviors such as addictions, drug abuse, prostitution, street begging, pocket-picking, shoplifting, kidnapping, terrorism, and insurgency in the country. This paper conceptualizes the phenomenon in the context of Nigeria. The study indicates that there are generative mechanisms within the society which influence the proliferation of youth homelessness in the country. Extreme poverty, insurgency, almajiri education system, high unemployment rate among the youths and insecurity are cited as some of the reasons for youth homelessness in Nigeria.

Keywords: South Africa, India, New world technological order, Brain-drain, Data, Algorithms, Semiconductor

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1. Introduction

Homelessness itself is complex and multidimensional across the world as many studies have indicated but it is even more complex and multidimensional in crisis and insurgencies regions like Nigeria than it is in many developed countries. Homelessness is a serious sociological problem that violates the principles of human rights, undermines human dignity, and threatens social cohesion.

Article 1 and 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights notes that,

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights... Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person, Article 25 states that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or

* Corresponding author: Joseph Aigbolosimon Famous, PhD Candidate, Doctoral School of Sociology, Eotvos Lorand University, Budapest, Hungary. E-mail: joesaintjoefame@gmail.com

other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection. Article 2 states that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status” (UHDR,1948).

If these declarations indeed apply to everyone and if the everyone is inclusive of the homeless youths and vulnerable street children scattered the cities of Nigeria then the main mechanisms generating youth homelessness could be rooted in the policy and socioeconomic structure of the nation rather than the individual personal pathological conditions of the people. Being homeless, sleeping rough on streets, slums, shanties, camps, and other inhabitable places do not align with ‘a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing’ of anyone especially youths and young people of any society. Poverty resulting from unemployment and job-insecurity are supposedly covered by the declaration. Healthcare, education, housing, clothing, and feeding among other basic sustainability could be readily accessible to the vulnerable populations especially to the youths, children, and women among others (Convention on the Rights of a Child, 1989).

The absence of all these necessary functions of the welfare services in the policy structure and the neglect of the social policy to embrace the welfare system gearing towards offering complementary alternatives that ensure inclusive and cohesive society makes anti-social tendencies like youth homelessness and other related manifestations to flourish across the nation.

Youth homelessness is a severe form of homelessness, and its driving factors is rooted in the whole social system, but the manifestation of the problem reflects social exclusionary pressure which may not only impede daily social engagements of the public but threatens the general peace and embarrass the whole economy. The driving factors are in most cases hidden within the social system with the potential of triggering homelessness and social vulnerability of youths in the society which could in the long run expose the vulnerable homeless youths to anti-social behaviours such as addictions, drug abuse, prostitution, street begging, pocket-picking, shoplifting, kidnapping, terrorism, and insurgency in the country.

2. The Federal Republic of Nigeria

Nigeria is a west African country with diverse geography, culture, language, and people. English is the official language and language of formal communications in every institution at the federal, state, and local levels. There are over five hundred languages being spoken in Nigeria apart from English and about 371 ethnic groups with the major ones being Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo. The country has abundant natural resources, large deposits of petroleum and natural gas. Nigeria was a British colony and was colonized by the British government in 1884, became independent in 1960 and adopted a republican constitution in 1963 and become known till date as the federal republic of Nigeria. Nigeria practices a democratic system of government and mixed economics structured around capitalism. The country is located on the western part of the African continent bordered by Niger to the north, Chad and Cameroon to the east, Gulf of Guinea of the Atlantic Ocean to the south, and Benin Republic to the west. Nigeria is composed of 36 states and a federal capital city. Abuja is the federal capital city of Nigeria while Lagos is the former capital of Nigeria as well as the most commercialized and industrialized city of the country. The country is grouped into 6 geo-political zones namely, North central, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest, and South. Figure 1 gives a clear description of the geopolitical zonings and their respective member states.

Nigeria is the most populated and the most populous country in Africa. It is the 7th most populated country in the world. About 220 million people live in Nigeria out of whom 52% inhabits the urban cities. It has a population density of 226 per km² (586 people per Mi²) and a total land area of 910770 km² (351,650 sq. Miles). According to World Economics (2023) Nigeria has an estimated GDP of about \$2.024 trillion. The National Bureau of Statistics indicates that 33.3% and 22.8% of the total population are unemployed and underemployed respectively while 42.5% and 21% of the total youths are unemployed and underemployed respectively.

Youths and young people constitute a huge number of the population of Nigeria. Nigeria has one of the largest number of youths and young persons in the world. Studies indicates that about 70% of the populations constitute young people of ages <30 which means that out the estimated 220 million people in the country about 154 million people are below 30. Nigeria has one of the fastest growing populations in the world with about 2.6% yearly growth rates (National Policy on Population for Sustainable Development, 2021)

However, according to World Data Lab (2023) over 71 million Nigerians currently live in extreme poverty which runs around 32% of the total populations of people in the country with young people ages 15-29 making up 27% of those in

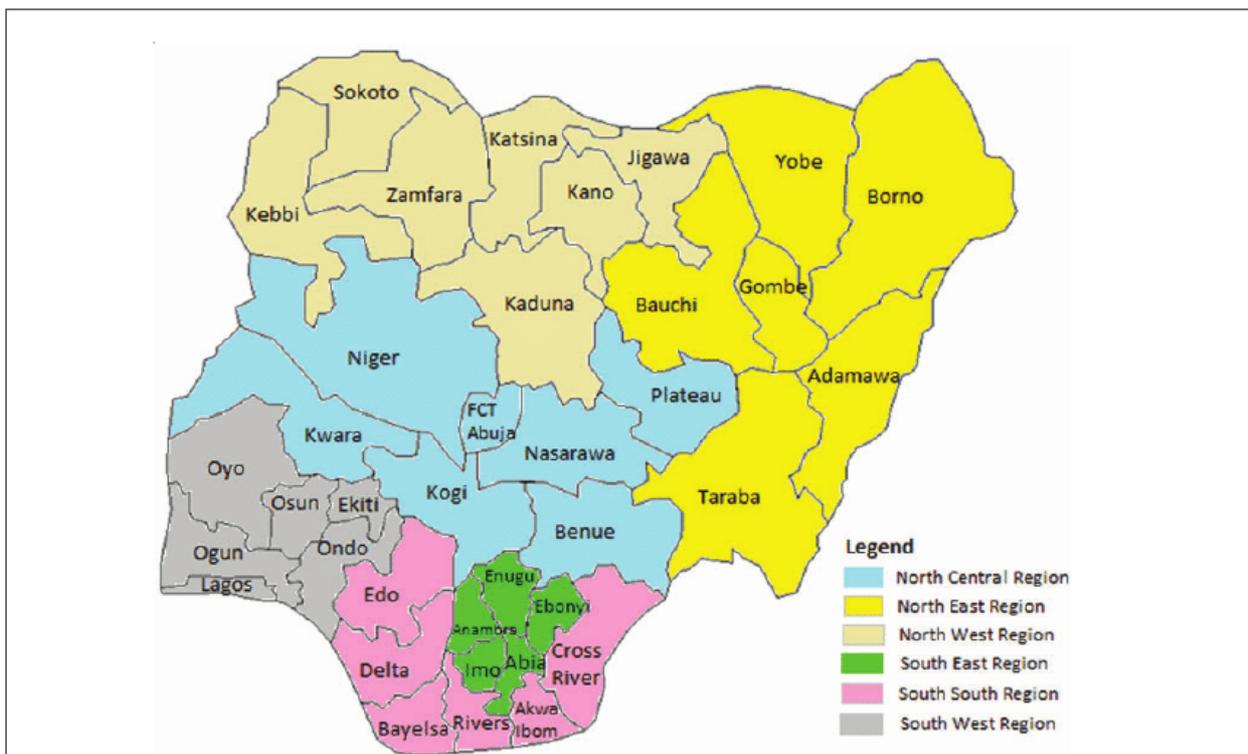


Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing the 36 States and Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Source: Gayawan Ezra, 2014

extreme poverty. It is notable that the number of people living in extreme poverty drops from 89 million in 2020 to 71 million in 2023 and from 43% of the total population in 2020 to 32% in 2023. Similarly, the number of young people ages 15-29 drops from 42% of the total population in 2020 to 27% in 2023 ([World Data Lab, 2023](#)).

The poverty rate in the country cannot be overemphasized. A national survey conducted in 2022 shows that:

“63% of persons living within Nigeria (133 million people) are multidimensionally poor. The National MPI is 0.257, indicating that poor people in Nigeria experience just over one-quarter of all possible deprivations. 65% of the poor (86 million people) live in the North, while 35% (nearly 47 million) live in the South. Poverty levels across States vary significantly, with the incidence of multidimensional poverty ranging from a low of 27% in Ondo to a high of 91% in Sokoto. Over half of the population of Nigeria are multidimensionally poor and cook with dung, wood, or charcoal, rather than cleaner energy. High deprivations are also apparent nationally in sanitation, time to healthcare, food insecurity, and housing. In general, the incidence of monetary poverty is lower than the incidence of multidimensional poverty across most states. In Nigeria, 40.1% of people are poor according to the 2018/19 national monetary poverty line, and 63% are multidimensionally poor according to the National MPI 2022. Multidimensional poverty is higher in rural areas, where 72% of people are poor, compared to 42% of people in urban areas. The National MPI is reported with a linked Child MPI, which provides additional information on Multidimensional Child Poverty in Nigeria. According to the report: Two-thirds (67.5%) of children (0-17) are multidimensionally poor according to the National MPI, and half (51%) of all poor people are children. The highest deprivations are in the indicator of child engagements—where over half of poor children lack the intellectual stimulation that is pivotal to early childhood development. Child poverty is prevalent in rural areas, with almost 90% of rural children experiencing poverty. Across the geo-political zones, the child MPI shows higher poverty in the North-East and North-West (where 90% of children are poor) and lower poverty in the South-East and South-West (74% and 65.1% respectively). The incidence of Child MPI is above 50% in all States and greater than 95% in Bayelsa, Sokoto, Gombe and Kebbi. Four million Nigerians—2.1% of the population—live with a child aged 15-17 who is the first generation in that household to have completed primary school.” ([National Bureau of Statistics, 2022](#)).

In another vein, a study by Ogwumike and Ozughalu (2018) shows “23.22% of children in Nigeria were in extreme child poverty while 70.31% of children in the country were in overall child poverty...there was pronounced child

deprivation in education, health, nutrition, child protection, water, and sanitation” (Ogwumike and Ozughalu, 2018). Not only that, but education deprivation is also another area where many youths, young people and children suffer deprivation in the country and such deprivation is in no small ways affecting and influencing their current socio-economic conditions in the country. *The Quest Times* (2022) notes that there are about 40.8 million school age out of school children roaming the street across Nigeria.

According to UNICEF (2023) “One in every five of the world’s out-of-school children is in Nigeria. Even though primary education is officially free and compulsory, about 10.5 million of the country’s children aged 5-14 years are not in school. Only 61% of 6-11-year-olds regularly attend primary school and only 35.6% of children aged 36-59 months receive early childhood education. In the north of the country, the picture is even bleaker, with a net attendance rate of 53%. Getting out-of-school children back into education poses a massive challenge. Gender, like geography and poverty, is an important factor in the pattern of educational marginalization. States in the north-east and north-west have female primary net attendance rates of 47.7% and 47.3%, respectively, meaning that more than half of the girls are not in school. The education deprivation in northern Nigeria is driven by various factors, including economic barriers and socio-cultural norms and practices that discourage attendance in formal education, especially for girls” (UNICEF, 2023).

It is also a notable fact that the medical and healthcare state in Nigeria is deplorable and inaccessible to all. Most of the federal, state, and local government owned hospitals are not equipped with advance technology and are underfunded by the relevant government and this among other things affects not only the scope of their activities but also the quality of the medical and healthcare services. According to International Trade Administration (2021) the “Healthcare infrastructure in Nigeria is still underdeveloped and lacks modern medical facilities...” (International Trade Administration, 2021).

Menizibeya (2011) states that “Nigerian healthcare system is poorly developed. No adequate and functional surveillance systems are developed. To achieve success in health care in this modern era, a system well-grounded in routine surveillance and medical intelligence as the backbone of the health sector is necessary, besides adequate management couple with strong leadership principles” (Menizibeya, 2011).

Studies indicate that “75% of the children in Nigeria do not receive basic vaccinations, 2300 children die daily from easily treatable diseases, 1 in 8 children do not reach their fifth birthday before death and only 2 of every 5 births are supervised by qualified medical practitioner in Nigeria, 3 in 5 boys and girls are victims of violence, 1 in 4 girls undergo female genital Mutilation, 20,000 children are separated from their families in north-east Nigeria, while 23 million girls and women are married as children” (UNICEF, 2023).

However, youth homelessness is a common phenomenon across Nigeria especially in most urban cities of the country. Studies have associated the causes of youth homelessness in Nigeria to extreme poverty, internal migration, housing shortage, eviction, threat of insurgencies, family crises, natural disasters, abuses, polygamy, early marriage, high fertility rate and other forms of Religio-cultural ideologies.

Interestingly, as a way of gathering data for the study 6 experts dealing with youth homelessness in Lagos and Maiduguri were contacted and interviewed in line with the predetermined purposes of the research. The experts include social workers, social psychologists and human right rights advocate and they have described the phenomenon of youth homelessness in Nigeria as follows.

Ajiflow (2022) (LAGEXrsp3) a social worker working with an NGO dealing with social vulnerabilities in Lagos Nigeria defines youth homelessness as the inability of youths to have shelter or a roof over their heads because of some challenges beyond their control. Damilis (2022) (LADEXrsp2) a psychologist and social worker working as dementia caregiving social worker in Lagos defines homelessness as “a situation where people or individuals do not have access to a stable shelter or enclosure and sometimes with absence or no access to basic social amenities”.

Slimbeauty (2022) (LAGEXrsp1) a social worker and expert of Domestic and Sexual Violence against youths working with the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency states that “Homeless youths on several occasions refers to youths that have a home in the village or in slum but hustle on the streets to make a living... many youths become homeless because of the struggles/difficulties in their homes. Some of them because of their drive to hustle and get themselves busy...in their course of making names for themselves, the lack of proper planning makes them end up on the street. ... homeless youths are called many names, agbero, omota, ole, this makes it difficult/rare for them to get support packages. They are viewed as social vices, young good for nothing that have nothing going for them and would rather steal than work.”

Pro (2022) (MDEXrsp1) a social psychologist working with an NGO dealing with homeless and vulnerable youths in Maiduguri defines homelessness as the situation of people without a conducive or comfortable place to sleep, stay or rest and most of whom usually sleep on the streets and other uninhabitable places of dwellings. There are a lot of homeless persons in Maiduguri comprising youths, women, and men. Most of the homeless are farmers, fishermen who have abandoned their communities and jobs and flee to Maiduguri for the safety of their lives while some of them are people who have left their villages in search for better standard of living in the city. They are usually choked up in the IDPs camp in an unconducive manner of living. They are usually dirty or unkept and often with various kinds of diseases ranging from skin diseases to hypertension, mental disorders, and most of them are unhappy and depressed. They are usually exposed to disease outbreaks because of their unhygienic way of living and mostly depend on government and NGOs for their necessities of living.

Meanwhile, homeless youths are mostly found in abandoned buildings, under bridges, railways, slums, shanties and other uninhabitable spots on the streets of Lagos. They are often situated in proximity with places of high commercial activities and most of them engage in different kinds of manual labour while some of them engage in street begging. According to Homeless experts in Lagos, Oshodi and Mushin Underbridge are very common abodes for homeless persons in Lagos. Study shows that most of the homeless youths in Lagos are triggered by the strive for potential economic sustainability which are often envisaged in highly commercialized and industrialized cities of the country.

3. Pathways of Homeless Youths in Nigeria

Pathways approach to understanding homelessness came to the fore due to the rising conceptual shift of the traditional (static) view on the nature of the phenomenon, to the view on its dynamic nature. Pathways of homelessness involve the full trajectories of the experience of homelessness by the victims of the phenomenon. Anderson and Tulloch (2000) views it an individual or household's route into and out of homelessness with their inherent experience through homelessness until they are securely housed. Mackenzie and Chamberlain (2003), refers it as 'homeless career' while Robinson (2003) uses 'trajectory' both of which reflect the process and dynamic nature of the life paths of the homeless persons (Clapham David, 2003).

From the above indications, pathways of youth homelessness involve the full course experience of homelessness until the exit point. In other words, it encompasses the entry routes, lived experiences, and exit route of homelessness. Entry route or pathway into youth homelessness comprises the driving factors or triggering forces that led the victims into homelessness. Pathways into homelessness is synonymous to the reasons for becoming homeless. Some scholars also use it interchangeably with the causes of homelessness.

Fitzpatrick (2000) studied 'pathways of young people through homelessness' in Glasgow which indicates unemployment, poverty and family conflict as the causes or pathways into homelessness. She believes that the understudied youths based on her findings had been structurally marginalized and socially deprived of the basic standard of living. Therefore, labeled unemployed as the major factor responsible for homelessness among the studied group (Fitzpatrick, 2000).

Laere *et al.* (2009) conducted a study in Amsterdam on the "pathways into homelessness..." which indicates that among the total participants (120), eviction (38%) and relationship problem (35%) were the majorly reported reasons why the understudied people became homeless (Laere *et al.*, 2009). Pathways into homelessness as noted by Anderson (2001) may include influences like relationship problems or the loss of a loved one.

Meanwhile, some experts working with homeless and vulnerable youths in Nigeria who were interviewed during the data collection process of this study have also expressed their views about the pathways of homeless youths in Nigeria as stated below.

Damilis (2022) notes that pathways of youth homelessness may be threefold namely pathways into, pathways through and pathways out of homelessness. Pro (2022) states that pathways of homeless youths vary depending on the location. Homeless youths in the eastern and western parts of Nigeria like Lagos for instance are basically hustlers. They are youths who have left their families and come to the cities to work for a better life. But homeless youths and homelessness in Maiduguri is usually triggered by the Boko-haram insurgencies and religio-cultural values in the North-Eastern parts of Nigeria.

Ajiflow (2022) notes that the reasons for youth homelessness in Lagos ranges from divorce, lack of parental care, polygamous family settings, and the death of one or both parents. Awas (2022) notes that the main pathways into youth homelessness in Maiduguri is linked to the wave of insurgencies in the remote communities and the religious values of some northern Muslims who encourage the practice of ‘almajiri’ system of education. BG (2022) identifies the causes of youth homelessness as insurgencies, lack of parental care and high birth rate of children without the capacity and ability to cater for their social wellbeing. Damilis (2022) states that the pathways into youth homelessness include dysfunctional family systems, peer pressure, poverty, unemployment and crisis or disaster. And emphasizes that homeless youths tend to be traumatized, physically abused, sexually abused, restive and engage in substance use.

Interestingly, studies are spotting high fertility rate as one of the contributing factors leading to youth homelessness in the northern parts of the country. Some scholars and studies show that Hausa/Fulani tribes in Nigeria are known for having more children than the other major ethnic groups in the country and they have recorded the highest number of female youths who married before the age 15 in the country. According to United Nation Population Fund, Figure 3 elucidates the spread of child or early marriage across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria.

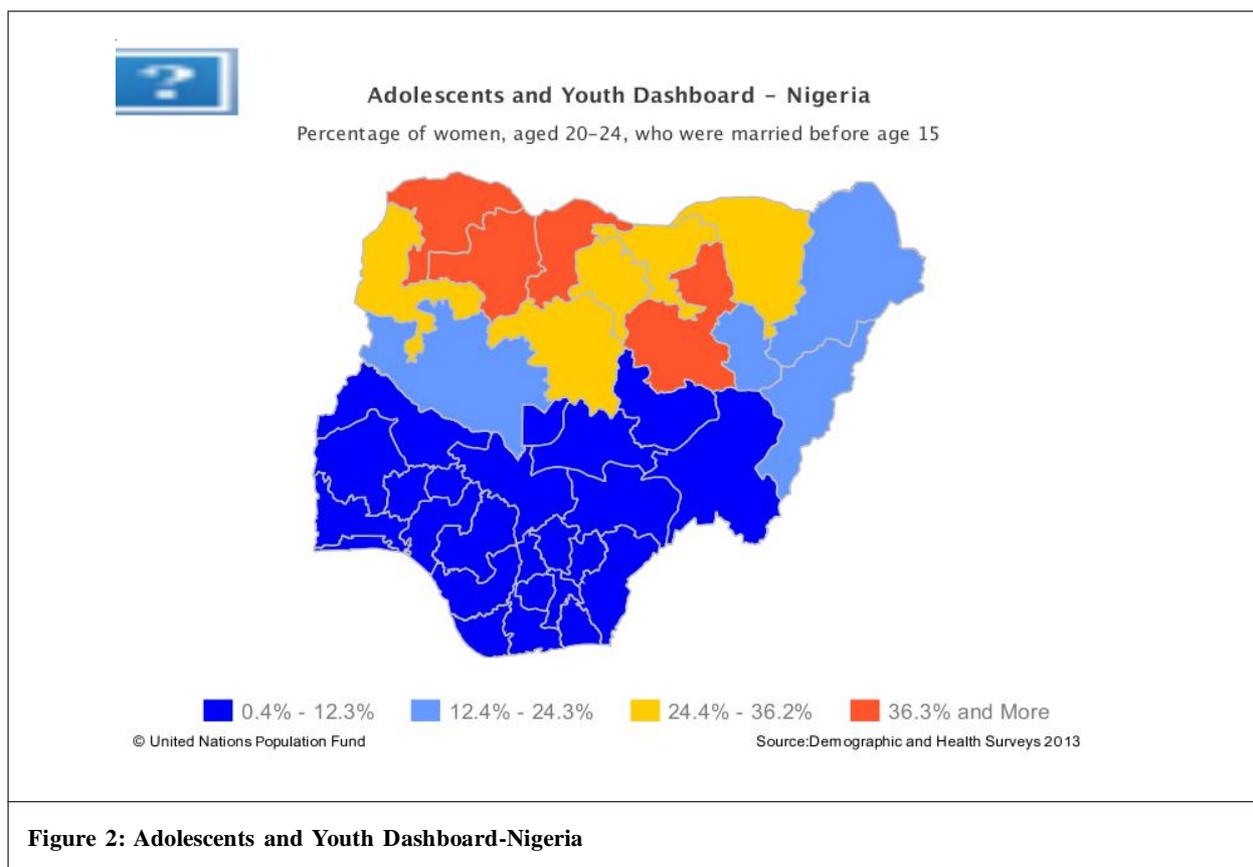
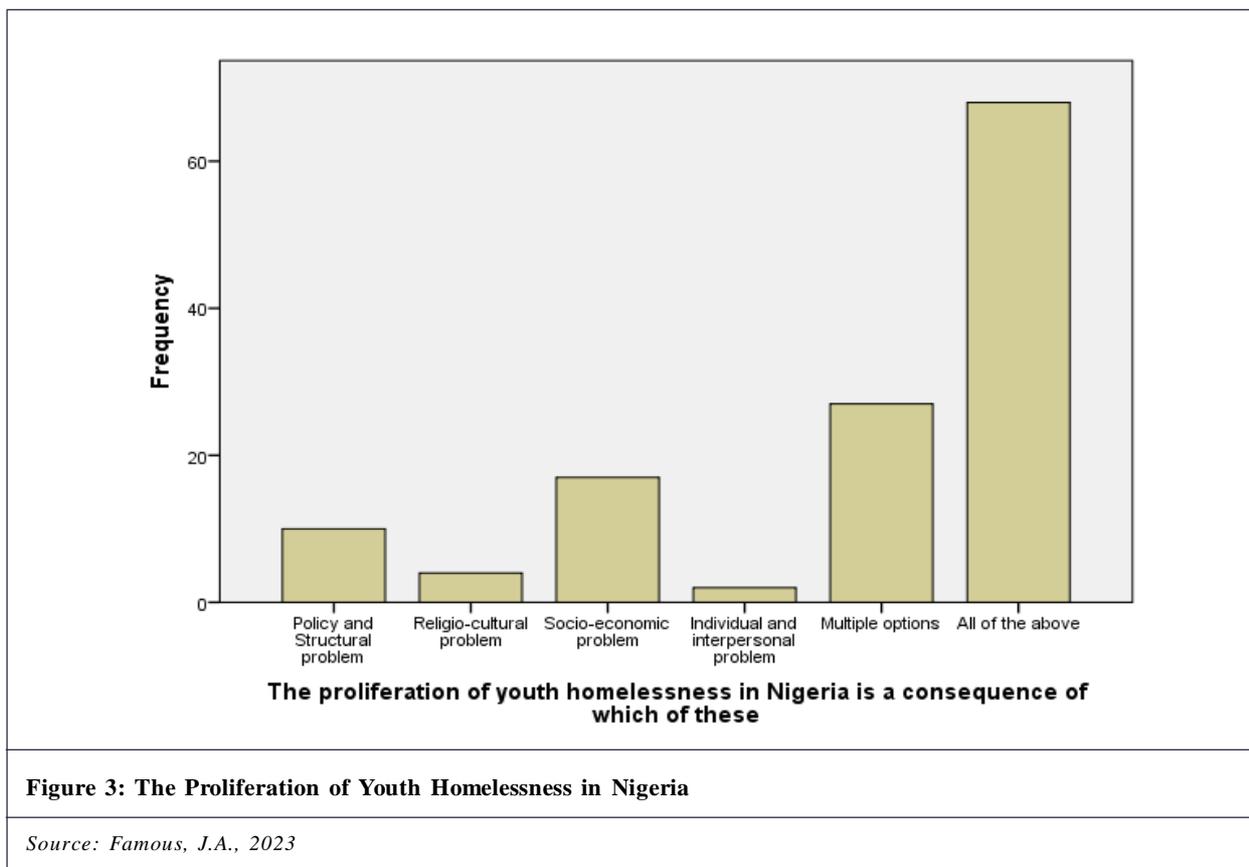


Figure 2: Adolescents and Youth Dashboard-Nigeria

The above diagram shows the percentage of female adolescents and youths who got married before attaining age 15. The southwest, southeast, south and parts of the northeast and northcentral regions maintain the lowest percentages; the northwest and parts of the northeast and northcentral regions occupy the highest percentages. It is worthy of note that the practice of polygamy, early child marriage and high birth or fertility rate is comparatively higher in the north central, northwest, and northeast regions of Nigeria than it is in other regions. Adebowale (2019) survey on fertility disparities among the major ethnic groups in Nigeria shows that women from Hausa/Fulani ethnic group have a total fertility rate of 8.02 while those from Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups have 4.91 and 4.43 respectively. But arguably, even if the aforementioned factors may not necessarily be causing youth homelessness in Maiduguri and the north, its probable influences may lead to youth homelessness in that region.

A survey on public perception of youth homelessness in Nigeria has categorised the mechanisms, generative structures or causes of youth homelessness into the categories of policy and structural problem, religio-cultural problem, socioeconomic problem, and individual and personal problem. It is notable that the survey tries to evaluate the mechanisms that has more impart in creating youth homelessness in Nigeria. Figure 3 shows the result of the survey on the proliferation of youth homelessness in Nigeria.



As clearly illustrated from the above bar chart, all four structures are involved in creating youth homelessness in the country, however, some structures are more involved than others. Policy structure and socioeconomic mechanism are more involved in generating youth homelessness in Nigeria than religio-cultural and individual structure as reflected from the result of the survey. It is important to stress that the major driving factors into youth homelessness is not the same for all geopolitical zones in Nigeria, while most homeless youths in Lagos reportedly become homeless because of the strive for economic sustainability like the search for a better employment opportunity in highly commercialized cities where there are clusters of events and productive activities for potential benefits; majority of the homeless youths in Maiduguri have the driving factors connecting to the religio-cultural ideologies and insurgencies. The common factors for both sides are extreme poverty, family or relationship issues and eviction. Religio-cultural ideologies may include the high practices of almajiri education, extremism, polygamy, and child marriage which mostly common among the Hausa Muslims in the Northern regions of the country.

The term “Almajiri,” is from the Arabic word “almuhajir” (emigrant in search of religious knowledge) which forms huge part of street children in northeast. They usually engage in begging on the street under the directives of their mallams. Most of the almajiri youths do not have formal education but only receive Quranic lessons from their Mallams. “Sani” an attorney and human right advocate in Nigeria refers them as vulnerable children out of whom many end up becoming extremists and be crime-involved due to inadequate parental care (Zakir *et al.*, 2014; William *et al.*, 2016).

Agbo (2019) describes almajiri as group of illiterates, unskilled and hopeless youths who are busy roaming the streets of the Northern Nigeria begging for alms rather than searching for knowledge. According to UNICEF, a typical almajiri child begs on the streets for about 6 hours per day and notes that it is difficult to actualize the total number of almajiri children in the north but estimated to constitute about 80% of the more than 10 million out of school children in the North.

Past studies have linked the practice of almajiri to the prophetic migration of Muhammed and his companion from Mecca to Medina. It is noted that his companions traveled alongside prophet Muhammed for the sake of expanding their stock of Quranic knowledge in which case they represent the earliest form of almajiri. So, with the advent of Islam to Nigeria in 1056 AD, the practice of almajiri or the almajiri system of education become instituted in the culture of the northern Muslims of Nigeria (Babagana *et al.*, 2018).

The almajiri youths are usually of ages 4<18 most of whom usually vacate their parental homes and travel to live with their mallams for the duration of their studies. The almajiri practice is a non-formal education and the system of education is usually free, and many northern Muslims adopt it as a plausible option for nurturing their children. Agbo (2019) describes them as group of illiterates, unskilled and hopeless youths who are busy roaming the streets of Northern Nigeria begging for alms rather than searching for knowledge.

According to UNICEF, a typical almajiri child begs on the streets for about 6 hours per day and it is difficult to actualize the total number of almajiri children in the north but estimate shows that they constitute about 80% of the more than 10 million out of school children in that region. Some cases of the interviewed victims of youth homelessness in Lagos and Maiduguri are shown below.

Pathways of some homeless youths in Lagos

SONEPA (OSDrsp4) is a 20 years old male youth of Yoruba ethnicity from Ogun state Nigeria. He is a Christian, stopped schooling at primary 6, currently works as a motor conductor and sometimes begs for living and lives on the train lines in Oshodi Lagos State. According to him, he became homeless after leaving his parent's home in Abeokuta, Ogun state and relocated to Lagos with friends in search of a better life. Hence, he has been homeless for 6 years.

ORIMONEY (OSDrsp6) an 18 years male youth from Yoruba Ethnicity from Ibadan, Oyo state. He is a Muslim and stopped schooling at JSS2 (Junior Secondary School 2). He works as a bus conductor and lives in the market with other homeless people. He has been homeless for 5years. He had left home (Ibadan) and travelled along with peers to Lagos in search of well-paid jobs.

BOBIRICHY (OSDrsp7) is 23 years male youth from Yoruba Ethnicity in Ibadan in Oyo state. He is a Muslim and stopped schooling after completing Secondary School. He works as a bus conductor (shadow), a laborer and comedian. He lives under the bridge at Oshodi and considers himself homeless. He became homeless after he left home (Ibadan) and traveled to Lagos in search of well-paid jobs and a better standard of living in Lagos. He has been homeless in Lagos for 6 years.

4. Pathways of Some Homeless Youths in Maiduguri

However, in Maiduguri and most parts of the north, youth homelessness is triggered mostly by religio-cultural ideologies and the wave of insurgencies in that region. Many communities in Borno states have been attacked by Boko Haram and other terrorist groups in that region which result to a huge increase in the number of internally displaced persons in the IDPs camps in Maiduguri. Most of the victims of insurgencies flee from their communities to the Maiduguri mainly because of the fear and imminent threats of insecurity of life and properties where they live. The cases of some of the victims of insurgencies who are interviewed during the studies are shown below.

MDrsp2 is a 25 years old male youth of Kanuri ethnicity from Maiduguri, Borno state Nigeria. He is a Muslim and had a secondary school education and he has a lived experience of youth homelessness before he became reintegrated to the society. According to him, he has been living in a village before fleeing to the city after being attacked by Boko-haram (an Islamic terrorist sect in the north-eastern Nigeria). He noted that several of their people in his community were killed while the rest of them fled from the village to live in the IDP camp in Maiduguri because of the security of their lives.

Another respondent MDrsp4 a 16 years old female youth of Shuwa ethnicity from Borno state Nigeria. She is a Muslim and non-working housewife with no formal education who currently lives with the husband in a rented apartment in Maiduguri under the threat of potential homelessness because she has been issued a quit notice for evicting her current accommodation due to the financial inability to pay the rent. She had been homeless before for 3years now she is under the threat of a potential homelessness. She became homeless after her village was attacked by an Islamic terrorist sect (Boko-haram). She notes; "Boko haram burnt our village, and we ran to Maiduguri".

Also, MDrsp5 a 23 years old male youth of Kanuri ethnicity from Maiduguri, Borno state Nigeria. A Muslim with no formal education who sells kola-nuts on the streets for a living and sleeps in the mosque links his pathway into homelessness because of the killing of his parents by an Islamic terrorist sect (Boko-Haram) in the northeast Nigeria. He notes "my parents were killed by Boko-Haram, and I become homeless".

5. Nigerian Social Integration Policy and Services for Homeless Youths

The Federal Ministry of Budget and National Planning Abuja (2016) has described social protection policy as "an umbrella policy framework that incorporates related social agenda paradigms intended to reduce poverty and provide a life of dignity for all citizens.... The policy seeks to reduce the scourge of poverty and improve the general well-being of all Nigerians through enhanced reduction of inequality and inequity as well as the provision of social incentives. This

is imperative to ginger human-centered approach to development so as to enhance investment in human and social capital. Development through good health and education, good governance including sound macro-economic milieu, among others, are essential for the promotion of inclusive growth, equality, security, and a life of dignity” (Draft National Social Policy Protection, 2016).

Interestingly, the Federal Government of Nigeria recognizes the global relevance of social protection as a plausible way of addressing and dealing with social problems like extreme poverty, socio-economic vulnerabilities, youth homelessness and displacement of young people around the country but probably lack the will of translating the theory into practices for the vulnerable Nigerians (Draft National Social Policy Protection, 2016).

Policies 6-11 of the national social policy protection draft specifically addresses issues of social welfare and child protection, social housing, livelihood, and employment. It promises to

“Provide health services, psychosocial support, and counselling to survivors of violence against persons, child labor, child abuse, child rape, and human trafficking. To provide decent and affordable housing for the homeless, the monetary poor, and families living in overcrowded and unhealthy conditions. Promises unemployment insurance and non-cash unemployment benefits to job seekers. Labor based cash transfer/Public Works Programs for Youths, persons with disabilities and the unemployed. Promises support for sustainable livelihood through skills training, access to land, inputs for smallholder farmers, affirmative action for youth and women’s employment, and access to financial services for micro and small enterprises and cooperatives as well as affordable childcare services for children under 5 to enable parents engage in productive activities” (Draft National Social Policy Protection, 2016).

In spite of the clarity of the stand of Sections 16 and 17 of the 1999 Nigeria constitution (as amended) and the principles of the social policy protection draft on the matter of social welfare and inclusiveness of the young people and women in Nigeria, youth homelessness, child labor, extreme poverty and youths’ unemployment and other socioeconomic vulnerability among the young people and women still flourish on the side within the country.

As a point of fact, the result of public evaluation of government policy in addressing youth homelessness in Nigeria as reflected on the online survey of public perception of youth homelessness in Nigeria as presented by the authors shows that the government policies do not practically address social inclusion and integration of the homeless and vulnerable youths in the country as it theatrically emphasizes. That explains the reason why about 55% of the respondents believe that the ‘government do not care about any citizen of Nigeria not to talk of homeless persons in the country. Also, about 60% of the respondents of the view that the role of social re-integration and inclusion of homeless and vulnerable youths in the country is most anchored and championed by the NGOs, foundations, philanthropists, and religious institutions in the country while only <20% agrees that government policies address it (Figures 4 and 5).

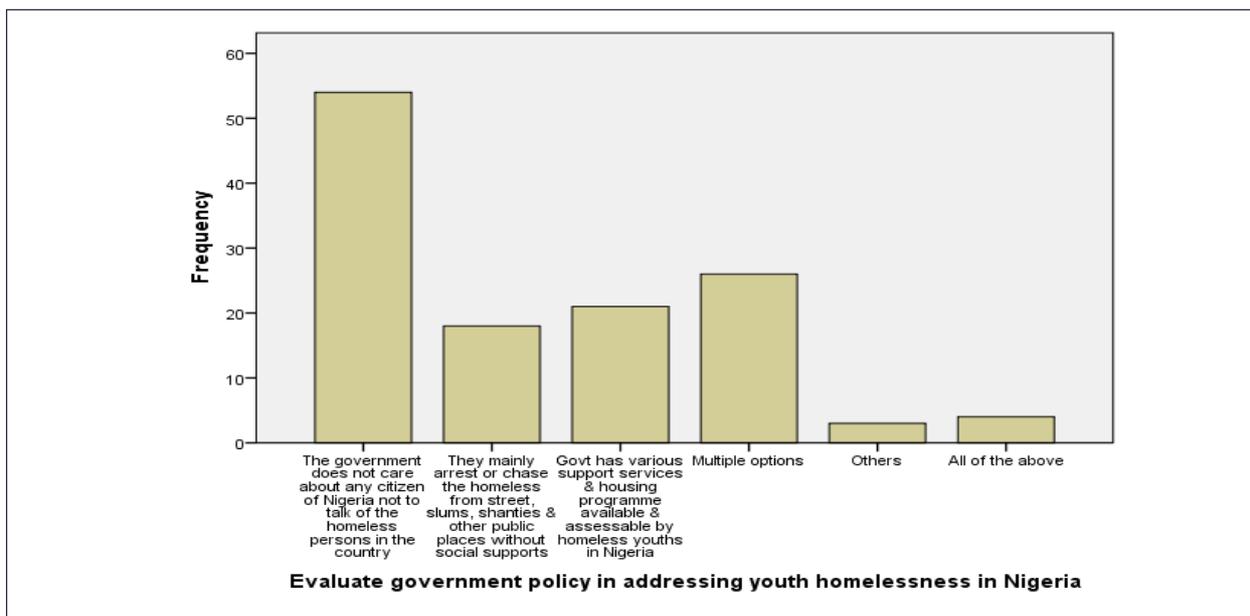


Figure 4: Government Policy and Youth Homelessness in Nigeria

Source: Famous, J.A., 2023

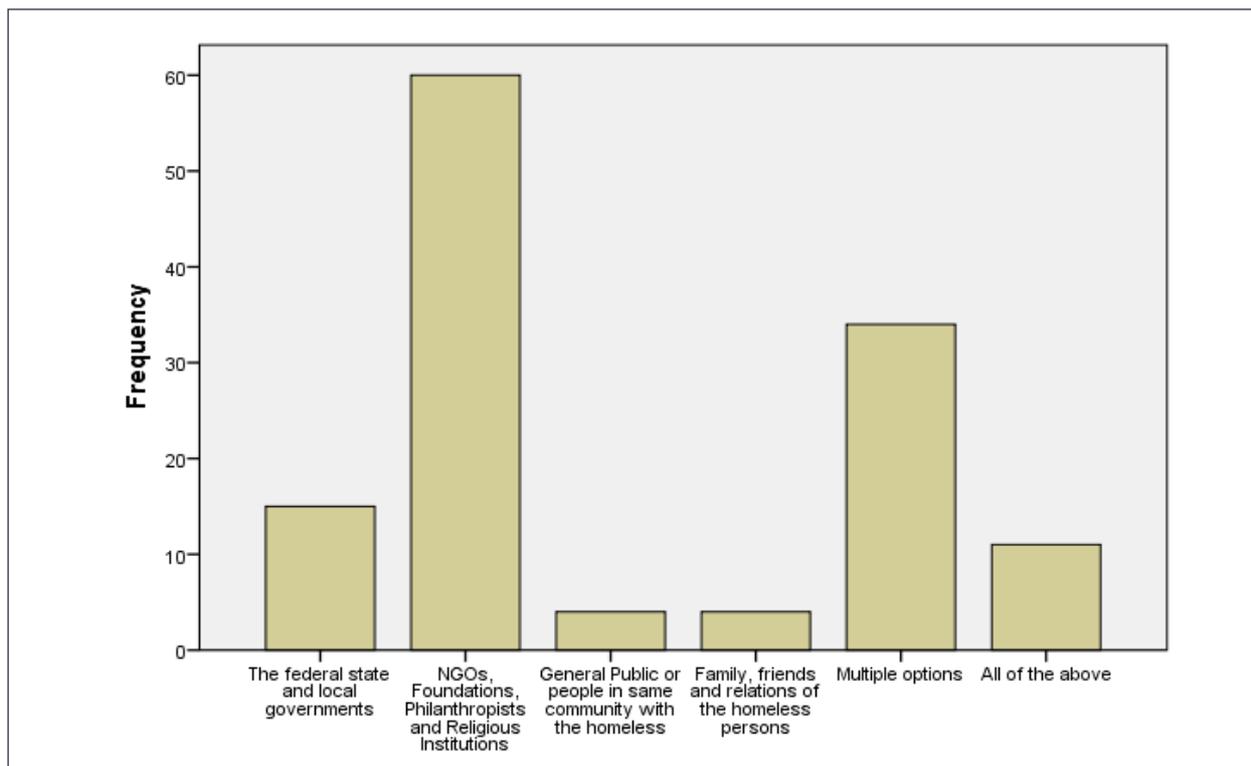


Figure 5: Role of relevant Stakeholders in social reintegration of homeless youths in Nigeria

Source: Famous, J.A., 2023

6. Social Discrimination and Criminalization of the Homeless Youths in Nigeria

Youth homelessness is not just a violation of human rights, it undermines human dignity and exposes the victims to segregation, seclusion, social discrimination, and criminalization. Article (7, 1 and 9) of the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights (1948) states that, “All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile” (UDHR, 1948).

However, studies have indicated that homeless youths suffer from social discrimination in the areas of healthcare, education, social justice, and other basic sources of livelihood from the economy. They experience housing and social exclusion and are often rejected by members of the public in the society, and they are more easily, raided, criminalized, and arrested by the police while some of them are incarcerated because of their living conditions and their inaccessibility to social-to-social justice in the country.

Geneva Mandate (2020) notes that homeless persons suffer discrimination, stigmatization and negative stereotype in Nigeria and the police task forces in Lagos often raid, arrest often subject the poor wandering homeless to monetary payment before granting them bail. According to the mandate, the police would arrest the homeless and ask them to ‘plead to the offence of wandering without evident means livelihood’ and they would be compelled to pay about 42 dollars or face incarceration (Palais De Nations, 2020).

In addition, result of the survey of public perception of youth homelessness in Nigeria indicates that homeless youths are most often perceived as criminals by the Nigeria police and taskforces. The bar chart below illustrates the result of the findings about the perception of the public regarding the stand of the law enforcement agency like the police and/or taskforces in relation to homeless youths in the country. As can be seen from the chart, about 55% of the respondents which is the majority believe that the Nigeria police visualize the homeless youths as ‘criminals, drug addicts, prostitutes, and persons with disabilities.’ And that partly explains why the police would always want to frown at the wandering youths in the country. The other factor may be resultant of the lack of governmental will to adopt a social welfare policy that suggests social support and inclusion as protective measures against youth homelessness in the country.

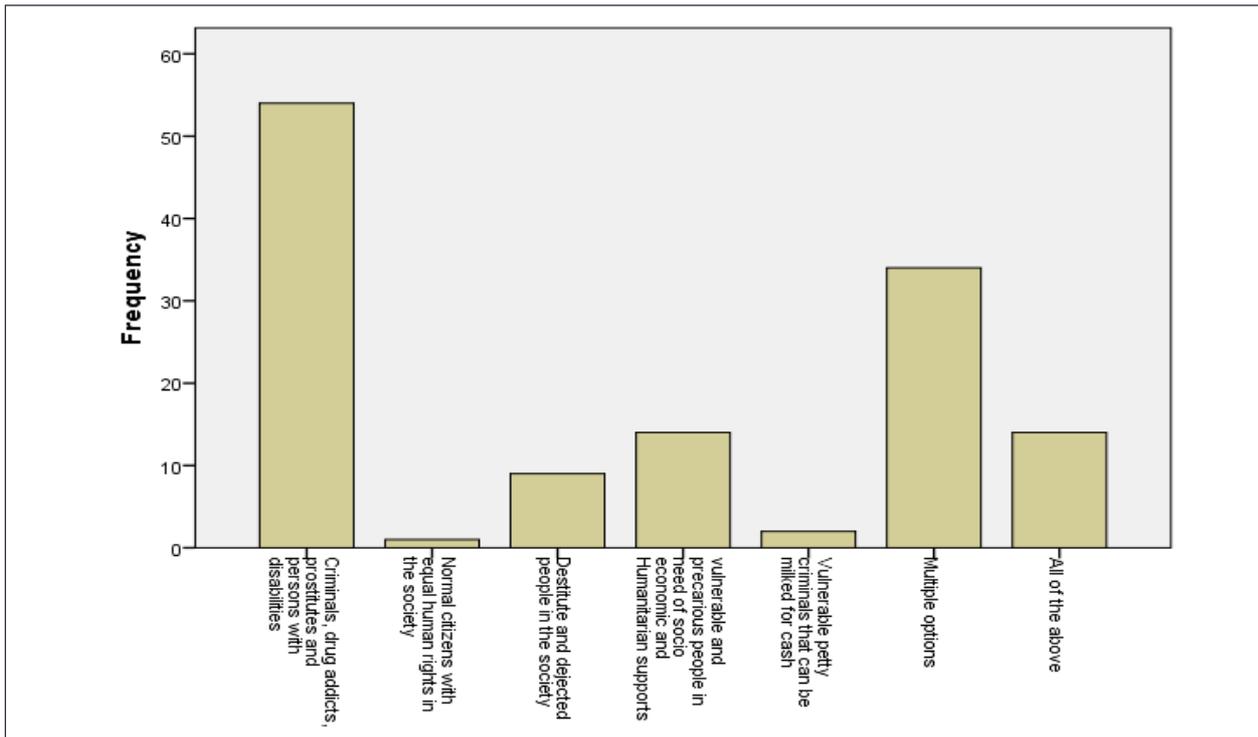


Figure 6: Criminalization of homeless youths in Nigeria

Source: Famous, J.A., 2023

Even though homeless youths also suffer social discrimination from the members of the public as some studies have indicated, the result of the survey on perception of the public about homeless youths in the country as reflected below shows that about 40% perceived of the respondents view them as ‘vulnerable and precarious people who are just in need of socioeconomic and humanitarian supports. About 20% see them as destitute and dejected people in the society, 10% perceive them as criminals, drug addicts and prostitutes; while only less than 10% thinks they are ‘normal human beings with equal human rights in the society.’ Meanwhile other respondents flung with all of the above and multiple options.

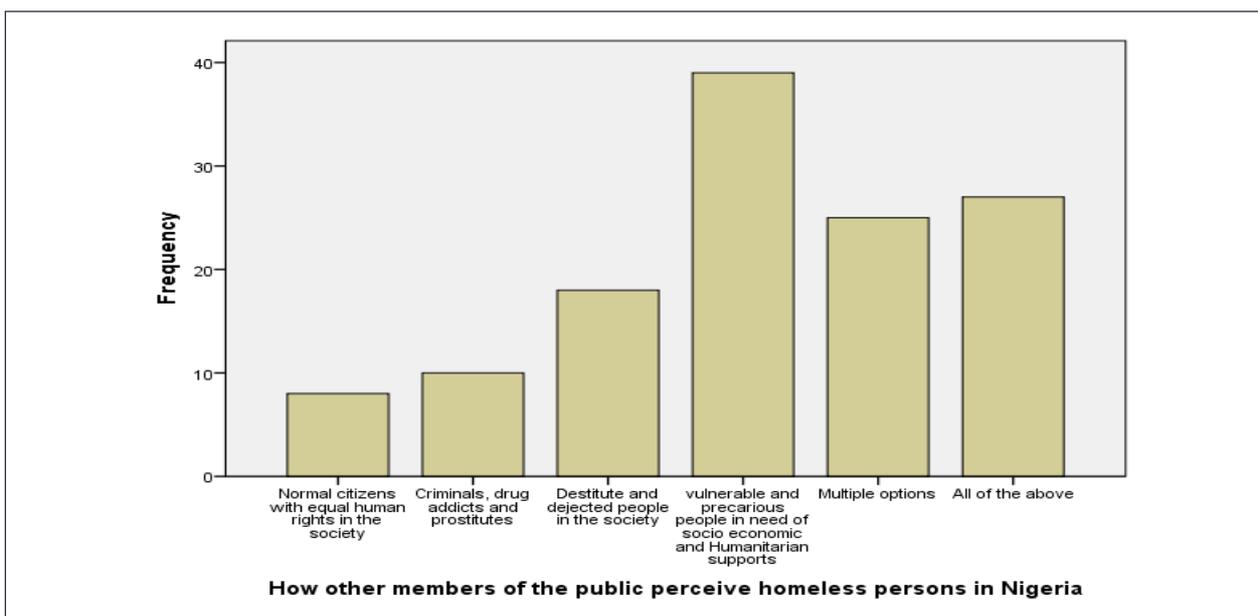


Figure 7: Public perception of homeless youths in Nigeria

Source: Famous, J.A., 2023

An interview with homeless youths in Lagos and Maiduguri shows that many of the participants experience social discrimination and rejection from the members of the public because of their living condition and social statuses. **MIDE** (OSDrsp11) is 23 years old homeless youth from Ikorodu, Lagos state who works as a head porter and lives under the bridge in Oshodi and who has been homeless for 2 years now notes that he experiences social discrimination and rejection from members of the public because of his homelessness.

A-FIZ (OSDrsp15) is 25 years male homeless youth from Oyo state who works as a head porter and lives under the bridge in Mushin, Lagos and has been homeless for a period of 3 years now notes that although, he has experienced conflict under the bridge but not personally involved in it. He has been personally arrested by the police but was later released from their custody and he often experiences social discrimination and rejection from members of the public.

Also, the 22 years old homeless youths **NAIRA** (OSDrsp8) from Ijebu Ode, Ogun state Nigeria who works as head porter (those who carry other people's load for them and get paid for it) and lives in a Kiosk in Oshodi. He experiences conflicts sometimes when they are engaged with others in fights on the street but has not been raided or arrested but has experienced a lot of social discrimination from members of the public because of his social status and living condition. He states, "We are usually perceived and regarded as pocket pickers and thieves"

NONICK (MDrsp1) is a 20 years old female homeless youth from Kanuri, Borno state Nigeria who lives in an uncompleted building in Maiduguri, Borno State has been homeless for 5 years now and said to have been living in IDPs camps before the government sent them out of the camp. She notes that she has never been arrested by the police but has been sexually harassed once when her husband was not around and has experienced social discrimination and rejection from some members of the public because of her living condition.

NONICK (MDrsp5) is a 23 years old homeless youth from Kanuri, Borno state Nigeria who sells kola-nuts on the streets for a living and sleeps in the mosque notes that became homeless after his parents were killed by Boko Haram. ("my parents were killed by Boko-Haram, and I become homeless"). He noted that he has been arrested by the police and experiences social discrimination and rejection from the members of the public because of his living condition.

NONICK (MDrsp7) is a 23 years old female homeless youth from Kanuri, Borno state Nigeria who lives in IDP camp (Banki) where the government provides for their needs. Notes that she had become homeless after Boko Haram had invaded their community and chased them away ("I became homeless in 2011 when Boko Haram chased us out and burnt our village... Boko Haram have killed my Husband and only me and my two children survived... I have been homeless since 2011"). She experiences social discrimination or rejection from the members of the public because of her living condition. According to her; "some people in the community don't want us to come close to them".

It is clear that homeless youths in Nigeria faces some form of social discrimination from the members of the public either as result of their living predicaments or because of their unkept appearances or both. And that could also be the probable reasons why they are easily raided, arrested, and criminalized by the police and other law enforcements agencies in the country. In any case, social discrimination and arbitrary criminalization of homelessness youths on the bases of their living condition and social statuses in the society is unjustifiable and violate both the 1999 constitution of Nigeria and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human rights as well as the 1989 Convention on the Rights of a Child.

7. Conclusion

Clearly, youth homelessness in Nigeria reflects the violation of the 1948 Universal Declaration of the Human Rights and 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. As indicated from the study youth homelessness in Nigeria is a factor of policy, socio-economic, religio-cultural and individual issues. But homeless and vulnerable youths are frowned at rather than attended to which serves a deviation from the the standard of human rights and a disrespect of human dignity. The role of social re-integration finds the NGOs, foundations, philanthropists, and religious institutions at the forefront of addressing the issues while the government only seems uninterested. It factual that Nigeria government pay little or no attention to the menace of youth homelessness and social vulnerability of the young people in the country. Reportedly, high extreme poverty, high unemployment, insurgency and among other factors could be complemented with an encompassing welfare policy that reflects the principle and purpose of Human Rights, Conventions and Nigeria which all serve a departure for the implication of social protection policies. Many homeless face social discrimination, criminalization, exclusion and depression and they live in unhealthy conditions. The driving factors into youth homelessness are more critical in crisis environments like Maiduguri because of the violent killings and destruction of belongings involved. However, government may address the security issues to enhance social cohesion, inclusive health and education couple with job-creation and the embrace of social protections and supports policies across the nation could remedy but the short and long-term effect of youth homelessness and social vulnerability of the young people in the country.

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